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ABSTRACT

The Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) conducted this study in order to obtain a central measure of institutional effectiveness in the performance of graduates in the work place. The answers to the study questions provide a basis for educational improvement. A survey was mailed to employers who register to recruit from DCCCD campuses. The survey intended to find out what kinds of businesses were hiring former DCCCD students, if these businesses were satisfied with the performance of former DCCCD students, and if a community college degree/certificate increased advancement opportunities. This 2001 survey was sent out to employers twice. The first mailing, sent to 643 employers, received an adjusted response rate of 12%, which was deemed unacceptable. The second mailing, sent to 483 employers and the results of which were used for this study, received an adjusted response rate of 18%. Findings included: (1) 78% of the employers felt that a degree/certificate does increase the employee's chances for advancement; (2) most employers (n=30) were of the "other" category, which was often automotive and service-related, followed by retailing (n=12) and veterinary services (n=10); and (3) 94% believed that DCCCD students were well prepared for the workforce. The survey is appended. (NB)

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Dallas County Community College District
2001 Employer Follow-Up Survey

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Dallas County Community College District

2001 Employer Follow-up Survey

Introduction

A central measure of institutional effectiveness is how well graduates perform in the work place. Are graduates and former students meeting or exceeding employer expectations? In what areas are our former students best prepared and in what areas are they least prepared? Answers to such questions provide an excellent basis for educational improvement.

A survey was mailed to employers who register to recruit from DCCCD campuses. The purpose of this survey was to address the following questions:

- What kinds of businesses are hiring former DCCCD students?
- Are these businesses satisfied with the performance of former DCCCD students?
- Does a community college degree/certificate increase advancement opportunities?

A summary of the major findings of the study and recommendation for future research follows. Individual survey questions are accompanied by tables of responses. The appendix contains the survey instrument

Research Methodology

In 1999, a similar study of employers was conducted. A list of companies with posted job-openings on DCCCD campuses was compiled and surveyed. In 2001, colleges were given the opportunity to augment this same list with companies actively recruiting on their respective campuses (not already on the list). From this, a more comprehensive sampling frame was drawn. Employers were asked to respond to the survey based on their experiences with former DCCCD students in their employ. While this approach does not permit the tracking of specific students (but rather asks the employer to assess all former DCCCD students they have employed), it provides meaningful assessment of former students without fatal selection bias. Conventional methods of employer follow-up surveys have required student permission to interview employers; subsequently, the sampling frame was reduced to those employers whom students wished to be interviewed. This tends to lead to a systematically positive bias in employee attitudes and opinions, since students who have had negative experiences are less likely to participate. The approach used in this study blindly surveyed all employers who may have hired former DCCCD students, permitting free response. Since the employer was not tied to a particular student, they were given the freedom to evaluate as many students as they have employed. The limitation to this approach is that employers may be evaluating individuals from other colleges, under the incorrect assumption that they are DCCCD graduates.

A total of 643 employers were mailed the survey (see Appendix) in April, 2001. There were 96 surveys returned non-deliverable and 64 useable surveys returned. Since the adjusted response rate of 11.7% was not deemed acceptable, a second mailing was done in June. Of the 483 surveys mailed, 12 were returned non-deliverable and 33 were completed as of July 20, 2001. This brought the total adjusted response rate to 18.1%.

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Companies Recruiting DCCCD Students

Students were employed by a broad spectrum of companies. These companies did not necessarily fall into conventional manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing and service categories, but fell into very specific lines of

business. Given a set of sixteen lines of business, employers classified themselves as follows:

Line of Business	Number
Other	30
Retailing	12
Veterinary services	10
Medical/health care services	8
Government	6
Banking/financial services	5
Education/learning	5
Food service	3
Real estate services	3
Recruitment/staffing	3
Manufacturing	2
Legal services	2
Insurance	2
Telecommunications	2
Computer/networking	2
Travel and tourism	1
Heating and refrigeration	1

Those who were categorized as "other" lines of business were given the opportunity to specify their line of business. The results were quite diverse. The following is a list of those responses:

- Accounting division
- Auto dealer (3)
- Auto mechanics
- Auto repair
- Auto service (2)
- Automotive (4)
- Automotive - repair
- Automotive service
- Car dealership
- Chemical dependency treatment
- Communications
- Community rehab
- Delivery
- Electronics
- Freight transportation
- Hairstylist
- Industrial equipment sales
- Lawn and garden service
- Non-profit (2)

- Non-profit service
- Public safety
- Public service
- Publishing
- Sales and service of air compressors
- Social services
- SS process eq.
- Technical auto
- Welfare

The employers were given the option of specifying their company's name. Most employers responded, giving the following list:

- 303 Animal Clinic
- AAFES
- Adecco Technical
- American General Financial Group
- Animal Hospital of Ovilla
- Auto Zone
- Bank One
- Bill Utter Ford, Inc.
- Bravo Technical Resources, Inc.
- Camargo Air Compressors
- Circle of Beauty
- CompUSA
- Crest Autogroup
- Dallas Co. Law Library
- Dallas Fire Department
- Ebby Halliday Realtors
- FBI
- Frank Parra Chevrolet
- Freeman Auto Group
- Garland Fire Department
- Highland Park UMC Child Development Program
- Huffines Chevrolet
- Insight Employment Assistance
- James Wood Auto Park
- KGGR Radio
- Lake Joe Pool Animal Clinic
- Las Colinas Veterinary Clinic
- Lone Star Overnight
- Med Provider
- Methodist Medical Center
- Moritz Chevrolet
- N.J. Malin & Associates, L.P.
- National Home Lending
- Nexus Recovery Center
- North Hills Lincoln Mercury
- Northwest Dallas Animal Clinic
- Prestige Ford
- Remedy Staffing
- Saint Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church
- Sanford Oaks Animal Clinic

- Sewell Cadillac
- SBA Business Brokers
- Summertree Animal and Bird Clinic
- Thornhill Auto Group
- Trammell Crow Co.
- Trinity River Mission
- TruGreen LandCare
- TX Dept of Human Services
- US America First Legal Services
- UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas
- Wells Fargo Services Co.
- Willow Run Animal Clinic
- YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas

Colleges Students Attended

Most of the employers noted that they employed students from more than one campus. It was not uncommon to find employers who hired from adjacent colleges (e.g., Brookhaven and Richland, or Brookhaven, Richland and Eastfield). This leads us to an evaluation of no less than 131 students in the following breakdown:

College	Number
Brookhaven College	39
Cedar Valley College	25
Eastfield College	19
El Centro College	22
Mountain View College	12
North Lake College	10
Richland College	20
Unspecified DCCCD college	8
Don't know	5
None of the above	5

It is worth noting that relatively few responses dealt with unspecified DCCCD colleges, while even fewer dealt with unknown colleges. This suggests that most employers had clear ideas of which DCCCD institutions their students attended.

Employer Assessments of DCCCD Students

Employers were given the opportunity to make assessments about the performance of DCCCD students, based on a fixed set of attributes. They were also given the opportunity to list any other skills/requisites which they felt were important for their specific business. In addition to specific assessments of performance, employers were also asked if they felt students were adequately prepared for the business world. Furthermore, they were asked if they believed a 2-year degree or certificate increases the employee's chance for advancement in the company.

Importance/Performance Ratings
(1-5 scale, 1 is least important/favorable, 5 is most important/favorable, "unsure" responses omitted)

Attribute	Average Importance	Rank (Import)	Average Performance	Rank (Perform)
Attendance/dependability	4.90	1	4.06	3
Listening	4.83	2	3.90	6
Ability to work with others	4.81	3	4.15	1
Verbal communication	4.81	4	3.93	5
Ability to work independently	4.62	5	4.04	4
Reading	4.62	6	4.09	2
Initiative	4.56	7	3.89	9
Problem solving	4.51	8	3.69	11
Writing	4.45	9	3.89	9
Resourcefulness	4.40	10	3.90	7
Leadership	4.10	11	3.67	12
Computer/technical	3.99	12	3.90	8
Mathematical	3.91	13	3.64	13

Agreement between importance measures and performance scores is good (correlation coefficient = .69), which suggests that students are performing best in areas that employers deem most important.

Note that importance and performance were both scaled from one (low importance/performance) to five (high importance/performance). Using this convention, we can see that all skills were of considerable importance. Alternatively, performances were not rated as highly on an equal five point scale; however, all attributes were rated above the mid-point, suggesting that students are performing in a satisfactory fashion.

Are Students Successfully Prepared for the Workplace?

Most employers believed that DCCCD students are well prepared for the workforce (94%), while few (6%) believed that they were not prepared. This does corroborate the performance ratings conclusion that former DCCCD students are performing satisfactorily in areas which employers deem most important.

Other Skills/Competencies Listed by Employers

When asked to list other skills important for their employees, employers provided a very diverse list of skills. Most dealt with specific skills for the line of business. The most commonly cited included:

- Basic skills (verbal, math)
- Work ethics
- Specific technical knowledge
- Interview preparation
- Customer service skills
- Commitment
- Organizational skills

The complete list of skills cited (verbatim) by employers is as follows:

- Strong commitment to stay and plant roots; realistic grasp of entry level pay; some idea of areas of interest (too many candidates in general (not just DCCCD) just want "a job").
- More higher-order "blue collar" skills like basic courses in mechanics, hydraulics, electronics, inventory control, customer service skills, selling skills and such.
- Appearance at interviews - increasing verbal and non-verbal presentation at interviews.
- Good resumes, assertiveness and a good attitude.
- Understand attendance is very important in small companies & sometimes there is not always someone to cover the person - like in larger co.
- Ability to write a good resume and have good interviewing skills.
- Creative, expressive.
- Verbal, reading, writing, mathematical knowledge. Resourceful, dependable and punctual.
- Medical technology, CPT coding ICD9 coding, telephone skills.
- Vet techs need more cytology & anesthesia.
- Work ethic. People skills.
- The educational programs with on-site lab schools are a definite plus for exposing the student to exceptional training experience.
- Listening is always the key.
- Customer service.
- A very strong work ethic and be able to communicate and serve the public.
- Organizational skills.
- Better knowledge of anatomy and physiology.
- I have had 2 students complete the management program. Overall I was impressed with the program. Specifically I would like to see more emphasis on writing skills.
- Organizational skills.
- Proactive responsiveness from unfamiliar situations.
- Flexibility - Need to look at whole program objectively. Evaluation skills.
- Work ethics, honesty friendliness - people skills.
- Writing is of the upmost importance, spelling, grammar - structure of business letters.
- Most are taught they will be paid excessive and not have to pay their dues. They are taught to live in a dream world where they will be hired as the boss and paid like the world owes them a living. All the world needs is more education and less people willing to work for a living because they are education.
- Graduates have zero writing skills.
- We love the employees from DCCCD. You guys do not do enough to assist these employees find work with wanting employers. I wish I had 20 DCCCD employees.
- They need to be honest about their skill and education. They need to know at work their attitude should be different than school, have respect for associate.

Does a 2-yr Degree or Certificate Increase Chance for Advancement?

To get a complete picture of employee performance and *potential*, employers were asked if an associate degree or certificate increases an employee's chance for advancement in their organization. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with approximately 78% indicating that the degree/certificate increases advancement opportunity, and only 15% indicating that the degree/ certificate doesn't increase advancement opportunity. A breakdown of responses is as follows:

Response	Number
Definitely yes	38
Probably yes	35
Uncertain	6

Probably not	14
Definitely not	1

Summary and Conclusions

Overall employer response was very encouraging. Most employers expressed satisfaction with the performance of former DCCCD students, in general and in terms of specific skills. The employers captured a broad cross-section of the regional business environment, and recruited a good balance of students from the seven district colleges.

Employer Survey Questionaire (in pdf format)

Prepared by District Office of Research, July 2001

Internal Reports & Summaries

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1. Have you hired former students from the following DCCCD colleges? Check all that apply.

___ Brookhaven College
___ Cedar Valley College
___ Eastfield College
___ El Centro College
___ Mountain View College
___ North Lake College
___ Richland College
___ DCCCD - but not sure of the exact college(s)
___ Don't know
___ None of the above

2. In your opinion, does the associate degree or certificate increase an employee's chance for advancement in your organization?

____ Definitely yes ____ Probably yes ____ Uncertain ____ Probably not ____ Definitely not

3. Based upon your experience in supervising employees who attended DCCCD colleges, please indicate the *importance* of the following factors and your *satisfaction* with the preparation of these employees in the listed skill areas. Circle the number that best reflects importance/performance, or "unsure".

Importance of Skill (Unimportant --- Important)						Skill Area	Employee Preparation (Unsatisfactory --- Satisfactory)					
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Verbal Communication	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Writing	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Reading	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Listening	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Computer/technical	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Mathematical	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Problem solving	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Leadership	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Ability to work with others	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Ability to work independently	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Resourcefulness	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Initiative	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure
1	2	3	4	5	Unsure	Attendance/dependability	1	2	3	4	5	Unsure

4. Overall, do you feel DCCCD is successfully preparing its students for the workplace? ___ Yes ___ No

5. Please specify any other skills/competencies that you feel the employee should have:

_____

_____

6. How would you best categorize your line of business? (choose only one)

___ Retailing
___ Manufacturing
___ Wholesaling
___ Food service
___ Medical/health care services
___ Legal services
___ Banking/financial services
___ Veterinary services
___ Insurance
___ Travel/tourism
___ Education/learning
___ Government
___ Telecommunications
___ Heating/refrigeration
___ Computer/networking
___ Real estate services
___ Recruitment/staffing
___ Other (Please specify: _____)

6. (OPTIONAL) Name of your company: _____

Please return the survey in the enclosed envelope. Thank you for valuable input.